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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that examined the perceptions of educational stakeholders in two regions of the Victorian Ministry of Education toward effective-schools issues. Data were obtained from a survey mailed to a total of 1,060 principals, school councillors, teachers, parents, and students in 100 schools--50 schools each from the southern and northern metropolitan regions of Melbourne, Australia. A total of 583 questionnaires were received from 81 schools. Overall, respondents perceived no dominant role for an effective school, but rather, a wide range of academic, citizenship, and personal-development functions. Staff and schoolwide decision-making processes were viewed as more important in the development of an effective school than were the specifics of classroom activities or the overall organizational system. Finally, school personnel perceived their schools to be effective. Follow-up visits to five diverse schools from the survey confirmed the latter finding. School personnel said that the most important element of an effective school is a dedicated and cooperative staff that utilizes effective communication and teamwork. Two tables are included. (Contains 22 references.) (LMI)

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School Effectiveness: A View from the School

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The pursuit of quality in education cannot be treated as a short-term, one-off exercise. It is a permanent priority. Education is not an assembly-line process of mechanically increasing inputs and raising productivity. How to improve its quality raises fundamental questions about societal aims, the nature of participation in decision-making at all levels, and the very purpose of the school as an institution.

(OECD, 1989:1)

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The past three decades have seen increasing complexities for people involved in the management of schools, both at the system level and at the school itself. Chapman identifies a series of events and situations that occurred during those decades which seem to have left a legacy for the managers of schools as we move into the 1990s. A substantial and rapid growth in the size of educational systems in many parts of the world in the early 1960s was brought about by the post war baby boom, coupled with an increasing demand for more schooling by society and a time of economic strength. Resources were poured into the building and staffing of schools, making considerations relating to the quality of what happened within them a secondary issue. (Chapman, 1990a:1:2)

Subsequent to this period of rapid growth, a downturn in birth rates in many parts of the western world in the 1970s, coupled with a change in the world economy in the 1980s that saw the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom losing their status as the economic superpowers of the world to other countries such as Japan and West Germany, saw new pressures being placed on schools in terms of what the students were taught and what proportion of them would successfully complete school. Formal reports such as A Nation at Risk (1983), Making the Grade (1983), Education and Economic Progress (1983), Investing in our Children (1985) and Who Will Teach Our Children? (1985) in the United States indicated the level of government and public concern about the issue and created a climate in which the relationship between education and competitiveness on the international market became inextricably linked. The more recent downturn in the world economy created a third concern for schools which led to the situation that schools were now charged with turning out as many graduates with the "right" skills and knowledge as possible and in the most cost effective way. Thus, in the past ten years in particular, schools have been faced with an increasing array of new and complex tasks at a time when governments have lessened the amount of economic support provided for

schools. As Chapman points out "such pressures have forced educational authorities to reassess educational needs both qualitatively and quantitatively." (Chapman, 1990a:1:4)

But the issue of the effectiveness of schools has been of concern to researchers, school policy makers and administrators for over twenty years. Significant reports on equality of educational outcomes were produced in a number of countries during the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these reports such as Plowden, (1966) in the United Kingdom; Coleman, (1966) in the United States and Karmel (1973) in Australia identified the close correspondence between educational success and family background.

The Coleman Report (1966) in particular, generated a response from researchers and practitioners which attempted to refute the basic premise of all of these reports which was summed up by the following paragraph:

> Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context... this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequality imposed on children by their home, neighbourhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. For equality of educational opportunity must imply a strong effect of schools that is independent of the child's immediate environment, and that strong independence is not present in American schools.
>
> (Coleman, 1966:325)

In the past twenty years or so, firstly in America and the United Kingdom, and then in many of the nations of the world, the issue of school effectiveness developed from a response to a critical perception of school's failings as identified by the Coleman and other reports to a world wide concern that sought to demonstrate the premise that, given certain conditions, schools can and do make a difference to a child's ability to succeed.

The direction that the debate on school effects has taken, however, does not appear to be the same in all countries and there is no common definition of what school effectiveness means, or to how it can be measured. In fact, the development of an "effective schools movement", driven particularly by research emanating from the United States, where a concern to improve the academic performance of students from minority or poorer backgrounds has been a key issue, has not been universally accepted as providing an appropriate view of the complexities of the issues involved. Consequently, some conflict has been generated in different countries, where, although the concern for making schools more effective is a common one, the concentration solely on inputs and outputs

with the subsequent orientation towards standardised testing and increasing minority group performance on them, is not. Scheerens (1990) provides an analysis of the complexities within the field of school effectiveness research and proposed a model that incorporated the ingredients that relate to issues of context and school wide and classroom processes in addition to the inputs and outputs which characterize most of the American "effective schools movement" research.

The complexity of this issue is brought about by there being no single definition of education and no common view of the role of schools. With no common view of the role of schools, it is impossible to conceive of a universal acceptance of any definition of an effective school that incorporates a statement of content within it.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

There seems to be a general acceptance by the public that when an attempt is made to improve schools that the underlying question is "What is wrong with schools today?" and that when the issue of quality is raised the implication is that schools are currently bad. News headlines such as "Teaching Fails Young - Poll" (The Herald, June 4, 1985) and consistent reports by employers that their newly appointed staff do not have the necessary skills for the job help to publicise and push the debate in a negative way. Yet this debate in many respects fails to use the documentary evidence that suggests that the opposite might well be true. For instance, although the absolute number of children who attended Australian schools increased by just over ten per cent from 1969 to 1987, the number of people attending higher (non TAFE) education increased by over one hundred and forty five percent. In 1969 about eleven per cent of the total population of Australia were attending higher education institutions, but by 1987 this had increased to almost twenty four percent. During the same period of time the apparent retention rates of children at school have almost doubled from about thirty percent in 1969 to nearly sixty per cent in 1987 (Australian Year Books, 1973, 1982, 1990). It would appear from these figures that schools had increased their effectiveness over that period of time by increasing the number of students from all backgrounds who completed school. If the numbers of people enrolling at higher levels of education can be used as a means for judging successful completion of school, then it appeared that not only are more children completing school, but that they are doing it successfully as well.

In some ways the criticisms that are directed at schools are due to the strategies used to determine the levels of school effectiveness. The sorts of measures that are used during the process of determining the effectiveness of particular schools create inbuilt

difficulties. In most cases individual schools have been identified as being effective or not on the basis of external viewpoints. Beare, Caldwell and Millikan, in identifying what they see as some concerns about the American model, provide a succinct differentiation between the American and the English models.

> The American studies used as performance indicators the national standardised achievement tests. Rutter, on the other hand, used absenteeism, behaviour in school, officially recorded delinquency and public examination results. Thus in the USA "effectiveness" meant raising the average scores in the school in mathematics and reading. Put bluntly, school effectiveness usually meant literacy and numeracy. Judging the effectiveness of a school by this criterion should cause disquiet to educators.
>
> (Beare, Caldwell and Millikan, 1989:12)

It can be seen from this quotation that, in most of the American research into school effectiveness, the sole criterion for judging the effectiveness of a particular school was student performance on externalised and standardised tests. One of the problems that this criterion led to was that, that if all schools improved their performance on standardised tests by fifty per cent, the raw scores would have increased, but the judgements about the individual schools would not have changed. Those schools that were judged as being effective because their students' scores put them in the top ten percent of schools in the country would still be there, but the schools who were in the bottom ten per cent would still be judged as being ineffective despite the fifty per cent increase in their students' performance. These external results also do not account for the student's initial capabilities (that is the actual increase in performance) or the individual school's possible manipulation of the result (for instance, by advising the poor student to go to another school).

But the use of external criteria as the main focus of a school's "effectiveness" is not exclusive to American research. In some respects the external criteria for schools in the United Kingdom, such as recorded delinquency and public examination results generated the same difficulties for the research, but some attempt was made to temper this external perception by the inclusion of school based data such as behaviour and absenteeism and by also collecting student intake data so that the judgements could be made relating to student gains in performance rather than simply student performance. Further, interviews of people who were involved in the school programs helped to identify the more complex issues that dealt with relationships and involvement. Two Australian studies into school effectiveness also used external viewpoints to determine a list of schools that were considered "effective". Both Mellor and Chapman (1984) and Caldwell

and Misko (1983) used senior officials of the Departments of Education in Victoria and Tasmania to identify "effective" schools in their respective studies.

In comparison to the great deal of research that looks at externally imposed views of effectiveness in schools, few studies have identified issues of effectiveness from the point of view of the local school community. Horn (1987) undertook a study involving local community perceptions of quality indicators in eighty small schools in Kansas, the North York Board of Education in Ontario, Canada (1984) asked parents about their perceptions of Priority 1 Schools, Galindo and Baenen (1989) in Austin, Texas investigated the views of parents, teachers, administrators and students with respect to school quality and effectiveness and Mortimore et al (1988) interviewed parents as part of their data collection for School Matters. In Australia, Aglinskas et al (1988) asked people at the school level about their perceptions of the effectiveness of schools.

The current research attempted to identify the views of the people most actively involved in any school's work, the principals, teachers, school councillors, parents and students. Rather than making external assumptions about what an effective school is, what characteristics it should contain and whether any individual school is effective or not, this study used the school effectiveness research to provide the basis for an internal review conducted by the people most intimately associated with the school.

THE AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE

The past two decades saw a new set of issues emerge for serious educational debate within Australia. The issue of the quality of schools, which had been on the educational agenda for quite some time, was joined by terms such as "school improvement", "excellence", "equality", "school based decision making", "devolution", "performance indicators" and "effectiveness of educational outcomes".

It is enlightening to briefly trace the origins of some of these terms, both from an Australian commonwealth level and also from the Victorian point of view. The Australian viewpoint provides the overall direction and thrust of the concerns identified and the Victorian perspective provides the background to the current study which was conducted in two regions of the state education system in the state of Victoria.

From the Australian context, much of the debate can be traced back to the Report to the Commonwealth Government by the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, which was entitled Schools in Australia (Karmel, 1973). It was here that the

issues of equality, devolution and community involvement were presented as part of a national educational debate, one that was to change the face of Australian schools dramatically for the first time in a hundred years.

In the preamble about equality, the committee expressed its belief that

> ...if incomes are to continue to be as unequal as they now are, there are good reasons for attempting to compensate to some extent through schooling for unequal out-of-school situations in order to ensure that the child's overall condition of upbringing is as free of restriction due to the circumstances of his family as public action through the schools can make it.
>
> (Karmel, 1973:11)

To substantiate its concern about equality of educational opportunity the Report identified that of people entering university in 1970, 64.6% had parents with a professional or managerial background, even though those students made up only 25% of the total age group, whereas only 20.2% of students with parents with a manual labour background were university entrants even though they made up 59% of the total age group (Karmel, 1973:17). In addition, whereas 55% of students with high socio-economic backgrounds remained in school until year 12, only 14.5% of students from low socio-economic backgrounds did so (Karmel,1973:18).

A second element of the Karmel Report that impinges on the current study was the issue of devolution of responsibility together with increased community involvement. The Committee identified its views on the issue of devolution as being

> Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of the pupils whom they teach and, at senior levels, with the students themselves. Its (the Committee's) belief in this grass-roots approach to the control of the schools reflects a conviction that responsibility will be most effectively discharged where the people entrusted with making decisions are also the people responsible for carrying them out, with an obligation to justify them, and in a position to profit from their experience.
>
> (Karmel, 1973:10)

The issue of equality of educational opportunity is effectively linked with the issue of devolution of authority by the argument

> Unless our conception of education broadens to enable schools to forge closer links with other socialising agencies, the possibility of providing equal life chances for children from all types of social backgrounds is severely limited.
>
> (Karmel, 1973:13)

The result of the Karmel Report of 1973 saw a massive increase in Federal funding for education provided by the commonwealth Labor government through the Commonwealth Schools Commission from 1974. Both individuals and school systems were provided with funds to assist innovative approaches to changing what happened in schools. Further reports in 1975 and 1978 continued the debate about equality (and identified special programs for country students, girls, migrant children and aborigines) and community involvement (which became a compulsory feature of any school that was to receive a disadvantaged school grant from the Commission) and the 1981 Report proposed a major new initiative called "The School Improvement Program", the basis of which was the Commission's underlying belief that any "on-going improvement in the quality of schooling could only be achieved by supporting the efforts and commitment of those at school level" (Chapman, Stevens and Banks, in Reynolds et al, 1989:47). However, due to the Federal Government's policy of reduction of government expenditure at the time of the proposal, these recommendations were not accepted and the impetus for the Commission's proposals returned to the states.

Subsequent to the Karmel Report, the state Liberal government in Victoria, responsible for the education of the citizens of the state, underwent both a devolution process and a parental involvement process during the 1970s which was followed by a strengthening of these by the new Labor government in the 1980s. By 1973 a regional system of education had been established throughout the state, and by 1975 school councils were established, and in 1984 had their powers extended, in every state school to ensure a high level of local participation. In many respects the development of school councils in the state of Victoria can be traced back to some of the recommendations made in the Karmel report of 1973.

The direction and extent of movement towards any particular national educational aim was, to a large extent controlled by the state government of the day, since in Australia, government schools are financed and adminstered by the state. Dale Mann expresses his opinion that "schooling is inevitably a (partly) political process" (Mann, in Reynolds et al, 1989:3). Since decisions about what schools should be doing, that is, their contributions to the society and the economy; decisions about how schools will go about providing those contributions, that is, what administrative arrangements will be imposed on schools; and decisions about the level of financial support given to schools, that is, how much money will be made available to ensure that the school's roles will be successfully undertaken, are all made by governments "the result is an institution that tries to do too many things, a dissatisfied public, and school administrators who are unusually interested in doing better within existing resources." (Mann, in Reynolds et al, 1989:3).

The differences that political dimensions and viewpoints can make to the direction that educational systems will move can be identified by the change of government in Victoria in the early 1980s. In 1980 the then Minister of Education for the Liberal government published the White Paper on Strategies and Structures for Education in Victorian Government Schools (Hunt, 1980). It identified six key themes that underpinned the changes that the government wished to make in education.

(a) devolution and decentralization of power and responsibility where appropriate to local and regional units;
(b) increased participation by parents, community members, teachers and principals in educational governance at all levels;
(c) improved consultation;
(d) economy and efficiency in management;
(e) effective co-ordination of functions and policies; and
(f) appropriate mechanisms for internal and external reviews of schools.

(Hunt, 1980:10)

School councils were to maintain their advisory capacity in terms of the development of the educational policy of the school. Just three years later, a new Labor Minister of Education put forward a series of six ministerial papers which outlined the policies of the new government for the state education system. The first of these papers, Decision Making in Victorian Education (Fordham, 1983) identified the following principles for development of the new system

(a) genuine devolution of authority and responsibilty to the school community;
(b) collaborative decision-making processes;
(c) a responsive bureaucracy, the main function of which is to service and assist schools;
(d) effectiveness of educational outcomes;
(e) the active redress of disadvantage and discrimination.

(Fordham, 1983:1.4)

By 1984 school councils became responsible for determining the general educational policy of the school within guidelines set down by the Minister and by 1985 school councils had a role to play in the selection of the principal for their school. It can be seen from these two excerpts that the issue of effectiveness and the issue of the redress of disadvantage and discrimination had become part of the politcal agenda within the state by 1983, whereas it had not been considered an issue by the government incumbent in 1981. It could also be argued that the Labor government had provided the mechanisms for genuine strengthening of the role of the school council with the movement from being an advisory to a determining body with respect to educational policy and with the added

ability to have some input into the selection of the person who would be responsible for implementing that policy, namely, the principal.

Further testimony to the commitment of the state government towards the principles established in 1983 might be provided by the establishment of the Committee of Review into Post-Compulsory Schooling in 1985 (the Blackburn Committee) which resulted in the most substantial overhaul of secondary education since secondary schooling had first been made accessible to the whole community after the completion of World War II. Peter Hill, chairman of the committee to establish the Victorian Certificate of Education reported "the VCE is central to the government's policies in education directed towards increasing the proportion of young people who complete twelve years of schooling." (Hill, 1987:1) It is also interesting to note that since the election of the Victorian Labor government the apparent retention rates in all schools of the state has moved from being less than the Australian average in 1980/81 (33.1% of the number of Victorian year seven enrolments in 1976 were in year twelve in 1981 as compared to the Australian average of 35%) to being the highest in Australia in 1987 (58.6 % apparent retention in Victoria as compared to the Australian average of 54%). The source of these figures were the Year Book Australia 1989 (Castles, 1989) and Victorian Education In Profile 1987 (Ministry of Education, 1988).

THE CURRENT STUDY

The issue of school based decision making and management became one central focus of the school effectiveness literature and demonstrated how closely school effectiveness related to the development of situations and people at the individual school level. Much of the school based decision making literature suggested that if decisions relating to school people and situations were made at the school level then there was a better chance of having the correct decisions made than there was if they were made away from the school at a district, regional or state level. This process of having the people who are expected to implement decisions being involved in the making of those decisions is a feature of the current school councils development in the Victorian school system.

Many governments of the world have emphasised their support for a variety of approaches designed to make schools more effective. Some have a movement towards more localized control of school decision making and school management, others have implemented much tighter quality control over the level of autonomy individual schools have, some have seemed to both simultaneously. The factor that is common to all,

however, is that the decisions being taken will have an effect on the people working at the school site level.

Hanushek (1986) argues that there is no strong relationship between product variables such as teacher-student ratios and student achievement. He concludes that "there appears to be no strong or systematic relationship between school expenditures and school performance." (Chapman, 1990a, 2:10). But resources do not have to be financially oriented. A considerable body of research now emerging suggests that where decisions are made is an important element in system effectiveness.

The issues of where decisions about school effectiveness are made, about levels of accountability to local communities and to the wider system and of system support for the decisions made at the school site level have not yet been addressed. In many cases the people who had to work with the new responsibilities implicit in localized control of schools were not fully consulted about what those responsibilities entailed, and in other cases the support systems that were necessary to make the new heightened level of local input work were not provided. In other words, the people who were expected to implement the decisions being made at state or regional level, had little or no input into the outcome of those decisions and little or no support from the education authority to ensure that those new responsibilities were carried out properly. The political ramifications of the movement towards school effectiveness may well be just as complicated as the concept is itself.

A review of the school effectiveness literature established that the definition of "school effectiveness", the concept upon which a lot of this world wide activity is based, has been shaped, not by the people who are now being asked to implement the concept, but by researchers and bureaucrats who are at least one step, and in some cases many more, away from the situation where the concept is expected to be turned into practice. It also established that different countries, and different people within the same country, are unable to agree on any single definition of what constitutes an effective school. The purpose of the current study was to establish an understanding of what "school effectiveness" meant and included from the point of view of the people involved in the implementation of this concept at the local level within the state of Victoria. It gave the people who are involved with the implementation of the effective school concepts, principals, the teachers, school councillors, parents and the students, an opportunity to identify their perspective of what an effective school was and what elements needed to be present before they were prepared to call a school "an effective school". It also hoped to establish whether or not these views were common to the different groups of people

involved at the school site, and whether or not there were differences between regions within the Victorian Ministry of Education.

The state of Victoria, the central focus of the current research, has more than half a million students and over fifty thousand teachers in more than two thousand government schools and a little over two hundred thousand additional students in non-government schools. The state has been regionalised into eight regions with student populations as low as twenty five thousand in the smaller country regions to over one hundred and twenty five thousand in the largest metropolitan region. The state budget for education occupies just over one quarter of the total budget for the state.

THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship, if any, between the perceptions of principals, school councillors, teachers, parents and students in government schools in two different regions of the Victorian Ministry of Education towards issues related to the effectiveness of schools. The variables considered in the study were: perceptions of the respondents in relation to possible roles of an effective school; perceptions of the respondents in relation to important elements contributing to the effectiveness of a school and perceptions of the respondents in relation to the effectiveness of their own school.

The study was conducted in one hundred schools in two distinct metropolitan regions of the city of Melbourne. In each region forty primary (elementary) schools and ten secondary schools within the state government education system agreed to take part. For each school, the principal, three school councillors, three teachers not on school council, three parents not on school council and (in secondary schools only) three students were asked to respond to the survey instrument. The study sought to collect and analyse the responses of principals, school councillors, teachers, parents and students to three major questions.

The Survey Population

One hundred schools agreed to take part, fifty in the Western Region and fifty in the Southern Region. In all 1060 questionnaires were distributed. Eighty one schools responded, forty two from the Southern Region and thirty nine from the Western Region. A total of 583 questionnaires were returned. About half of the schools who did not respond, indicated that the teacher ban on extracurricular activities was the reason that the questionnaires had not been completed. Others indicated that they felt the school was not

"ready" for such a survey. In all 417 people from the primary schools and 166 from secondary schools responded. (see Table one)

CHARACTERISTIC	SOUTHERN REGION		WESTERN REGION		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
SCHOOL TYPE:						
Primary	238	71.9	179	71.0	417	71.5
Secondary	93	28.1	73	28.9	166	28.5
SCHOOL LOCATION						
Urban	279	84.8	211	83.7	490	84.3
Rural	50	15.2	41	16.3	91	15.7
SCHOOL SIZE						
Under 50	14	4.2	17	6.7	31	5.3
Between 50 and 150	8	2.4	37	14.7	45	7.7
Between 150 and 400	127	38.5	126	50.0	253	43.5
Between 400 and 800	127	38.5	51	20.2	178	30.6
Over 800	54	16.3	21	8.3	75	12.9
GENDER						
Male	135	41.0	87	34.5	222	38.2
Female	194	59.0	165	65.5	359	61.8
AGE						
Under 20	23	7.0	28	11.1	51	8.7
Between 20 and 30	19	5.7	45	17.9	64	11.0
Between 30 and 40	136	41.1	103	40.9	239	41.0
Between 40 and 50	124	37.5	67	26.6	191	32.8
Over 50	29	8.8	9	3.6	38	6.5
ETHNIC BACKGROUND						
Australian	288	87.3	219	86.9	507	87.1
Other English Sp.	29	8.8	18	7.1	47	8.1
Non-English (Europe)	13	3.9	13	5.2	26	4.5
Non-English (Asia)	0	0.0	1	0.4	1	0.2
Other non-English	0	0.0	1	0.4	1	0.2
POSITION IN SCHOOL						
Principal	37	11.2	31	12.3	68	11.7
School Councillor	87	26.3	69	27.6	156	26.9
Teacher	87	26.3	70	27.8	157	26.9
Parent	96	29.0	53	21.2	149	25.6
Student	24	7.3	29	11.6	53	9.1

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the sample population

Some of the demographic characteristics of the two regions include the southern region having a slightly lower percentage of people born overseas than the average for the

Melbourn Statistical District (MSD), and both the western and northern regions (which make up the western metropolitan region of the Ministry of Education having higher than the average for the MSD. However, if the figure is analysed further, it can be demonstrated that the percentage from non-British backgrounds are considerably lower for the southern region and considerably higher from the western and northern regions. Secondly, the western metropolitan region has a higher proportion of people under eighteen and a lower proportion of people over fifty five than does the southern metropolitan region. Thirdly, the western and northern suburbs generally show the lowest levels of adults with post school educational qualifications where the employment base is significantly more blue collar oriented than in the eastern and southern suburbs. (VGPO, 1988:174) From this perspective the major differences in the two regions appear to be related to cultural background and types of employment.

a. What is the major role of an Effective School?

Respondents firstly were give the opportunity to indicate their level of agreement with fourteen statements that listed various roles that might be associated with effective schools. Respondents generally were in agreement with all of the statements (see Table two) where a score of one equalled strong agreement, two equalled agreement, three equalled an uncertain response, four disagreement and five strong disagreement.

SCHOOL ROLE	SOUTHERN REGION	WESTERN REGION	ALL SCHOOLS
1. An effective school will provide students with a good understanding of basic academic skills.	1.294	1.401	1.34
2. An effective school will provide students with the skills necessary to become employed.	1.633	1.737	1.68
3. An effective school will provide students with the opportunity to develop leadership skills.	1.839	1.913	1.87
4. An effective school will provide students with a caring and supportive environment.	1.345	1.405	1.37
5. An effective school will provide students with the skills necessary to become a productive and useful citizen.	1.48	1.56	1.51
6. An effective school will provide students with the attitudes and skills necessary to develop a healthy understanding of themselves and others.	1.426	1.476	1.45
7. An effective school will provide students with a balanced curriculum that encourages a wide range of learning experiences.	1.263	1.321	1.29
8. An effective school will provide students with the opportunity to develop a value system that reflects the major values of our society.	1.967	1.992	1.98
9. An effective school will provide students with teachers who act as role models for the development of community values and habits.	1.97	1.996	1.98
10. An effective school will provide students with an opportunity to be involved in the decison making processes within the school.	2.067	1.865	1.98
11. An effective school will use a range of assessment strategies to identify the student's level of achievement and also any learning difficulties that may diminish the students' learning potential.	1.408	1.478	1.44
12. An effective school will provide parents with regular communications about their child 's achievements.	1.341	1.466	1.40
13. An effective school will provide parents with an opportunity to be involved in the development of school policies and processes.	1.665	1.61	1.64
14. An effective school will provide parents with the understanding that the school is responding to the needs of the local community.	1.876	1.817	1.85

Table 2
Mean scores for the roles of an effective school

In the second part of this question, respondents were asked to indicate what they considered to be the major role of an effective school. They were given the opportunity to select from the following list.

1. The **major role** of an effective school is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the basic academic skills.
2. The **major role** of an effective school is to provide students with the skills necessary for future employment.
3. The **major role** of an effective school is to provide society with productive citizens.
4. The **major role** of an effective school is to provide students with a healthy self concept.
5. The **major role** of an effective school is to develop a value system that reflects the spiritual nature of man.
6. The **major role** of an effective school is to respond to the educational needs of its local community.

Respondents were given the opportunity to add others if they did not agree with any of the six listed. When asked to choose which of six alternatives they considered to be the MAJOR role of an effective school respondents provided the following result.

Academic	22.9 %
Citizenship	21.3 %
Other	20.8 %
Self Concept	16.9 %
Employment	10.3 %
Community	6.9 %
Spiritual	0.9 %

"Other" consisted of a total of 121 responses. Of these 28 indicated that all six roles were equally important, 46 indicated between two and five of the roles, and 47 indicated a role not previously mentioned. These could be categorised into " a wide range of learning experiences" (7); "the development of the student's full potential" (12); "the skills necessary for the future" (18) and a "commitment to learning and relearning" (10).

Statistically, the order of the rankings was highly correlated between school councillors in each of the regions, between teachers in each of the regions and between school councillors and parents for the whole sample. However some interesting differences emerged when one considered the results based on primary and secondary schools in each of the regions. (See Table three) The table indicates that the responses from primary and secondary schools from both regions are roughly the same for the citizenship, self

concept, spiritual, community and other alternatives. However, substantial differences occur for the academic and vocational dimensions. The table indicates that primary school respondents of both regions are much more concerned about the academic dimension (at the expense of the vocational dimension) and the opposite is true for secondary schools. It also indicates that respondents in the southern region place a much greater emphasis on the academic dimension at both primary and secondary levels than do respondents from the western region, whereas respondents in the western region place a much greater emphasis on a balanced view (as characterised by "other) at the primary level and on the vocational dimension at secondary level than do respondents from the southern region.

b. Which elements, that contribute to the effectiveness of a school's operations, are the most important?

Respondents were asked to indicate which of eighteen selected elements, collected from the school effectiveness literature which emanated from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia that they considered to be important elements in the development of effective schools.

The response could be broken down to indicate four levels of response. The first group of elements are those that received support from more than ninety percent of the respondents. These were:

element number	description	mean score
3	Dedicated and qualified staff	0.979
9	Early identification of learning difficulties	0.919
12	Home-school relations	0.914
17	Positive motivational strategies	0.905
10	Safe and orderly environment	0.9

The next group of elements all received more than eighty but less than ninety percent support from the respondents. They were:

element number	description	mean score
1	Clear school purpose (policy)	0.895
8	Monitoring student progress	0.876
15	Teachers take responsibility and are involved in planning	0.869
11	Positive school climate	0.854
5	High expectations	0.832

The third group of elements consisted of those that received more than seventy but less than eighty percent support from the respondents. These were:

element number	description	mean score
16	The support of the responsible education authority	0.773
2	Academic and administrative leadership	0.771
4	Staff development	0.766
7	Time on task	0.765
13	School based decision making	0.758
6	Academic focus on the curriculum	0.727
18	Opportunities for student involvement and responsibility	0.72

The only element to receive less than seventy percent support from all respondents was element fourteen, "School Council involvement in the selection of senior staff" with a mean attitude score of 0.664. It is interesting that this element is the one that is the most recently introduced development in Victorian government schools, and people may therefore not have had enough time to make a positive judgement about it.

Respondents were asked to put in order which of the eighteen were their five most important elements. The results provided the following overall ranking:

1. Dedicated and qualified staff
2. Clear school goals
3. Academic and administrative leadership
4. Positive motivational strategies
5. Safe and orderly environment
6. Positive school climate
7. Early identification of learning difficulties
8. High expectations
9. Home-school relations
10. Monitoring student progress
11. Time on task
12. Academic focus to the curriculum
13. Staff development
14. Teachers take responsibility for and are involved in school planning
15. School based decision making
16. The support of the responsible education authority
17. Opportunities for student involvement and responsibility
18. School council involvement in the selection of senior staff

Statistically, there was a high level of correlation for all groups in both regions, and between groups except for Principals and Students and School Councillors and Students across the whole sample. This result gives a clear indication that quality staff and school wide decision making processes are considered to be more important than specific

classroom methods and system organisation when it comes to having an effective school.

c. How effective is your school?

Respondents were asked to make a perceieved judgement about the effectiveness of their own school in comparison to what they knew about other schools. The alternatives were:

1. My school would be amongst the most effective schools in the state.
2. My school would be more effective than most schools in the state.
3. My school would be about as effective as other schools in the state.
4. My school would be less effective than most other schools in the state.
5. My school would be among the least effective schools in the state.

Overall, the schools included in the survey were perceived to be effective by the people within them with a total of 63% of respondents indicating that they felt that their school was either more effective than most schools or among the most effective schools in the state. Only 2.3% felt that they were less effective than others in the state. There was a significant difference between schools in the southern region and schools in the western region with those in the southern region being seen as being more effective by people within them than those in the western region were. There was also a significant difference between teachers and principals on the one hand and teachers and school councillors on the other. In both cases teachers saw their schools as less highly effective than did the other two groups. For the whole sample the following percentages were obtained

	ALL SCHOOLS					
	Principal	School Councillor	Teacher	Parent	Student	TOTAL GROUP
My School would be among the most effective schools in the state.	14.9	24.0	10.1	22.2	30	19.3
My school would be more effective than most schools in the state.	56.7	44.7	47.7	38.9	26.0	43.8
My school would be about as effective as other schools in the state.	0	30.7	38.9	36.1	38.0	34.6
My school would be less effective than most schools in the state.	28.4	0	3.4	2.1	4.0	1.8
My School would be among the least effective schools in the state.	0	0.7	0	0.7	2.0	0.5

Overall the survey indicated that

(a) There was perceived to be no dominant role for an effective schoolbut rather a wide ranging set of experiences that encompassed the academic, citizenship and personal development dimensions.

(b) That issues related to the nayure of the staff and to school wide planning and administration were seen as being more important in the development of the effective school than were the specifics of what went on in the classroom or the overall organisation of the system.

(c) That overall, schools were seen by the people who work in them as being effective. If quality is an issue in Victorian schools, then it is not seen as being a negative issue in the sample schools.

Follow Up Case Studies.

Following the collection and collation of the data, five schools, selected on the basis of the questionnaires returned, were visited by the researcher to establish the views of people in the schools towards the results of the survey. Each of the five schools, selected because the respondents from those schools felt that their school was particularly effective, turned out to be very different from each other. One was a primary (elementary) school that received supplementary grants on the basis of their school profile, one was a small primary rural school with a student population of sixty three, one was a primary school established only eighteen months previously, one was one of the largest secondary schools in the state and one was a secondary school in a satellite city near Melbourne.

Yet each was judged as being effective by the people within them. Although people expressed surprise at the result that indicated that an Academic focus within the school did not score more highly, most agreed that the complexities of what makes up a school indicates that the other areas identified needed to be granted equal importance. Almost all people interviewed in these schools saw them as being as good as they could be given the external constraints on them. When asked to identify their ideal school of the future, a number of interviewees suggested that it would be similar to the school they were in.

Perhaps the most significant result in the research was the support for the element called "dedicated and qualified staff" which was identified as receiving a larger score (when scores were calculated) than any two other elements when it came to selecting the most important elements that contributed to school effectiveness. Verbal evidence provided an

even stronger impression that it is the people within the school and the way in which they work together, that makes the school effective, rather than any specific program or direction.

This was further supported when two new elements, which had not been identified in the survey instrument, were listed by respondents as key elements in school effectiveness. The first was "communication" and the second was described in various ways but could be listed as "teamwork". Both of these elements reinforce the essential human characteristics of the "effective school", characteristics that are not similarly evident in test scores or attendance graphs.

One final comment. Parents within the case study schools were asked, "Given what you know about schools today, would you prefer to have gone to school when you did originally, or to go to school today." The result was about half and half. All felt that schools were better today than they were when they attended school, but the half that would not like to attend school of today all gave their reason as being "I would not like to be a child today.... given the pressures that they have to cope with."

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